

Series I
Correspondence,
1932-1973

Box 9, Folder 9

Copies of
correspondence of
MajGen Fergusson
and an article by...

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES ARMY TRAINING CENTER, INFANTRY
AND
FORT ORD
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDING GENERAL
FORT ORD, CALIFORNIA 93941

3 April 1967

Dear Swede:

Inclosed is a copy of the remarks made by Admiral
Sims concerning football training used as an example to show the
importance of specialized training for Naval officers.

Regards.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "R. G. Fergusson", is written over the typed name.

R. G. FERGUSSON
Major General, USA
Commanding

Incl
as

Vice Admiral H. E. Overesch
Riata Road
Pebble Beach, California

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Football Training used as an example to show the importance
of specialized training for Naval Officers.

On November 11, 1912, Captain (later Admiral) W.S. Sims, USN, delivered a lecture before the Staff officers of the U.S. Naval Academy concerning "The Practical Character of the Naval War College." Therein, he used the game of football to describe the importance of systematic mental training. The following is quoted from the lecture.

"Of course, all officers understand in a general way that we must know how to handle a great fleet if we expect to succeed in strategy and tactics; but I am sure I am not wrong in stating that too many officers tacitly assume that this knowledge will come to us as a result of a faithful discharge of our duties as we advance in years and grade toward positions of command and responsibility.

"I am going to attempt to explain this by using as an illustration the method of training employed in a game with which you are all very familiar, namely, football. This game does not cover a sufficiently extensive field to serve as a complete illustration of the strategical and tactical difficulties involved in handling a great fleet; but it will, I believe, serve well enough to make clear the distinction between the two essential elements of success; the material and the mental elements--that is, first, the strength, equipment and training of the individual units and, second, the training of the guiding and coordinating minds.

"Let us, therefore, examine the principles and methods of training which have enabled us to attain such a high degree of excellence in playing this strenuous game. If you want to teach your team to play successful football, you set it to work actually playing many games against other strong teams. The players themselves develop by experience new plays and devise methods of counteracting the plays of the opposing team. This they do under the guidance of coaches, who are men who have made a special study of the subject, who are the experts in the art of football war.

"In playing these games against other college teams, your men are getting ready for a football war that will be declared against West Point in November. These practice games are similar in all essential elements to the "war game" you will play against your friendly rivals of the other branch of our military service.

"Your method of training is, therefore, perfect in all respects, simply because you can repeatedly make exactly the same kind of "war" in your practice games that you will make in the great game at the end of the season.

"If we could use our great fleet in the same manner and to the same extent, that is, in numerous competitive fights with other fleets, our preparation for a naval war would thus be rendered equally thorough; but of

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course this could not be done without the loss of many ships and many men. A few such games and we should have no navy left. We must, therefore, seek some other method of instructing and training our officers in the art of war.

"In order to illustrate the nature of the methods that we are forced to use in training our officers to handle a fleet in war, let us suppose that our football games were as deadly as naval battles. Suppose that a game with West Point, or with any of the other colleges, always resulted in the death of at least five or six players of each side. If that were true, it is evident that you would have to give up your practice games with the other colleges and devise some other method of training for the great game with West Point.

"Assuming that the public interests required the West Point game to be played, what would you do about it? Manifestly, you would get up a kind of practice game that was as nearly like the real thing as you could make it without the risk of actually killing anybody.

"In playing such practice games with eleven men on a side, you would be using your brains to get up new plays and your bodies to carry them out, as far as you could without causing any deaths. In every such game you would be training your minds in anticipating the probable strategy of the enemy and in making rapid decisions to resist his attacks as soon as they developed.

"Our method of training officers to handle a great naval force with the highest possible efficiency in battle is necessarily very similar to that which would be required for training a team to play football if the latter game were as deadly as a naval action. The captain of such a team corresponds to the commander-in-chief, and the players correspond to the individual ships and their commanders.

"The football player consists of a body of flesh and a brain. The fleet unit consists of a body of steel, and a brain--the captain. In each case, the brain directs and the body executes. Both are essential to success.

"The real business of the navy is preparation for war. All of its training must have that end in view. If war should unfortunately be forced upon us, it must find the fleet prepared in every particular. This preparation comprises many different elements. We build our ships as strong, as swift and of as great gun power as possible, and we train their crews to the maximum practicable degree of efficiency.

"We train ourselves to maneuver the ships accurately and to shoot the guns with the greatest possible precision. Similarly the men of the team are trained until each is as capable as we can make him.

"Now, suppose we assume a group of perfectly efficient battleships and a squad of big, strong, athletic midshipmen, and see what we should have to do to obtain an efficient fleet and an efficient football team. Let us take 22 ships and 22 midshipmen, and assume that both ships and middies have been trained individually, but that they have never practiced maneuvering together or playing any game together. Divide the midshipmen into two teams of eleven each, and what success would they have in playing a game of football? Needless to say, there would be no team work, no combination plays and in place of intelligent direction of the whole, there would be collisions and general confusion. They could probably be out-maneuvered and beaten by a good high school team.

"If ships that had never been trained together as a fleet were to fight a battle, they would have a similar experience.

"Neither the men nor the ships can do much:

1. Until they have mastered the theory and all the practical fine points of the game.
2. Until they have practiced working together until they can act as a single body--as a real team--in applying all the fine points.

"But there is still another element of success, the most important of all, and that is the man whose brain directs the whole action. The football team must have an efficient captain and the fleet must have an efficient commander-in-chief. These are the men who train their respective teams to act as single bodies. They must not only have complete knowledge of the strategy and tactics of the game, but they must train their individual units to understand and apply them. They must develop new plays and devise the signals that indicate them; and they must have rapidity of decision, inflexible determination of character and plenty of nerve to carry out their plans of operation.

"All of these really military qualities are wholly essential to success. For example, a man may, in the solitude of his study, acquire at leisure a complete mastery of the theory and principles of football, or of the strategical and tactical principles governing naval warfare. This is knowledge, but, indispensable as it undoubtedly is as a guide, and valuable as it may be in preparing the mind leisurely to reach a correct understanding of the significance of any situation that may arise, it is not an adequate training in the personal qualities that make for success in battle. These qualities are moral and mental ones. They comprise the ability to recognize, not leisurely, but promptly, the military significance of each strategical and tactical situation; ability to withstand surprise without impairment or suspension of judgment; rapidity of decision and promptness of action; and inflexible determination in carrying out the plan of operations.

"These indispensable qualities of mind and military character can be acquired in no other way than by constant and intense competitive practice—constant and intense training of the mind and the will through handling the various types of situations in competition with alert minds that are handling the forces on the other side. We all recognize the importance of complete theoretical knowledge of the principles of any subject, and the importance of a complete mastery of all the practical details involved; but it may be doubted whether we all fully realize the no less imperative necessity of actually training our minds to apply the principles of naval warfare with that confidence, rapidity, and determination without which success is not possible in conflict with a well-trained enemy.

"This subject of mental training through constant mental practice is of such importance that, even at the risk of tediousness, I will attempt still another illustration, also based upon the game of football.

"Suppose a thoughtful and studious midshipman should come forward with a team of eleven men and base a claim to the honor of defending the Academy against West Point upon the following grounds: 'My team is composed of the eleven best athletes in the Academy. I have trained them physically until they are each of them stronger and faster and have more endurance than any other men on any other team in the country. They can kick a ball straighter and farther than any others, and they can tackle harder. We have not paid any attention to any of the books or articles written by the masters of the game, nor have we received any instructions from these experts. We have practiced a bit with the ball on the field, but we have never played a real or a make-believe game against another team; but as we are individually stronger men, swifter men, longer kickers and harder tacklers than any others in the country, we believe we can win.'

"It needs no argument to show that such a team could not win if pitted against another team all of whose members had been thoroughly drilled in team work under competent coaches, and thoroughly trained in many actual games against other strong teams. The eleven individually trained men could not win because a well-trained team, even though composed of weaker men, would have the enormous advantage of the ability to act as a whole, without confusion and with confidence and precision, under the leadership of a captain whose mind had been trained, in actual conflict with other minds, to accuracy of judgment, readiness of resource, and promptness in action.

"Applying the above illustration to our naval service will, I believe, show not only a marked resemblance in conditions between the navy and the untrained team of eleven strong men, but will indicate very clearly the nature of the means necessary to render the navy efficient.

"Analyzing the principal elements of success in football and in naval warfare, we find the following striking similarity.

"There are three primary elements that are essential to success in football, namely: efficient material, adequate knowledge of the game, and adequate mental training in applying this knowledge.

1. Efficient material requires individual team members who are physically well developed and well trained, strong, swift, hardy men who can buck the line hard, kick hard, and take punishment.

2. Adequate knowledge of football--a mastery of the theory of the strategy, tactics and practical details of the game.

3. Adequate mental training--a leader and men whose minds have been trained by constant team practice to apply their knowledge and strength with the utmost rapidity and mutual confidence, and to take instant advantage of any situation that arises.

"There are also three primary elements that are essential to the success in war of a nation's fleet, namely, the same elements--efficient material, adequate knowledge, and adequate mental training:

1. Efficient material requires fleet units individually well trained, ably commanded, powerful, swift, and able to give and take hard knocks.

2. Adequate knowledge--leaders and commanders who have a thorough knowledge of the art of war.

3. Adequate mental training--a leader and commanders whose minds have been trained by constant team practice to apply their knowledge with the utmost rapidity and mutual confidence, and to take instant advantage of any situation that arises.

"As previously explained, you now can and do develop to the highest degree all three elements of success in football by your present methods of training. You have the husky men, you know the game, and you can develop your ability to play the game by practicing it as much as you wish under exactly the same conditions as those that will pertain in your final games."

Later in the lecture after referring to the importance of War Games -

"The war games--the tactical games and chart maneuvers--bear the same relation to efficiency in handling a fleet as dotter and subcaliber practices bear to efficiency in handling a ship's battery, or as practice on the field bears to efficiency in handling a football team.

"Men practice on the football field until their minds are trained instantly to meet and act upon any situation that may be presented. Their method of training is perfect.

"Similarly, officers practice the war games until their minds are so trained that decisions flow naturally and almost automatically from the war doctrine developed by the training itself.

"You have all seen husky untrained midshipmen successfully trained by practice until they became alert, quick minded and expert football players. You fully realize that without such mental practice, such a process of making and correcting mistakes, success would be impossible.

"In the comparison made between an untrained football team and an untrained fleet, I have, for simplicity, purposely assumed a fleet of eleven vessels. This is hardly more than a squadron, to be handled, like the football team, under the immediate eye of its commander. But the man who directs extensive naval operations has a much more complicated task to perform. He may have under his command no less than 140 fighting ships of various classes, not including torpedo boats and submarines.

"As such a fleet, even if in massed formation, would cover an area of over 100 square miles, and probably 1000 before the action was over, it is evident that but a small part could be within view from any one position; and that therefore the commander-in-chief would have to be guided by a study of the positions of the various subdivisions as plotted on a chart--which would be exactly the same process that he would employ in war games, with respect to detachments that were beyond the range of vision, or so far away that their maneuvers could be determined only by instrumental measurements. The same process would of course be required in controlling the strategical maneuvers that preceded the tactical engagement.

"Thus it will be seen that, in order to play these war games with success, the leaders require the same kind of knowledge and the same kind of mental training as they would require to conduct successful naval operations. They are, therefore, not only highly valuable training, but training of the most practical possible kind.

"I hope I have made it clear that these war games are not only eminently practical as a means of acquiring essential mental training, but also that this training cannot be acquired in any other manner whatever; that the really practical men are those who study war and train their minds to conduct it with success; that an officer's whole career should be a preparation for the duties that may devolve upon him in a time of great national danger.

"My contention is that we should devote at least as much thought and energy to preparing ourselves to win battles on the sea as we now do to preparing our football teams to win games on the gridiron."

LECTURE CONCLUDES ON THEME OF THE IMPORTANCE OF POST-GRADUATE EDUCATION.

R. G. FERGUSSON
Colonel, Infantry
Chief, Army Advisory Group
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